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SPEECH BY MR CHAI CHONG YII, SENIOR MINISTER OF STATE
FOR EDUCATION, AT THE OPENING OF SEMINAR ON "THE TEACHING
OF ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE" AT HWA CHONG JUNIOR COLLEGE
ON SATURDAY, 7 MAY 1977 AT 0900 HOURS

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Recently, people often talk about the standard of languages in our schools. This shows that people from all walks of life are concerned with problems faced by the schools in the teaching and learning of languages. In our Chinese schools, the teaching and learning of Chinese language is easier to handle and does not have much problem. On the other hand, the schools face some difficult and complicated problems in respect of English language. These problems if carefully analysed and studied by our teachers can be resolved, though more efforts are needed. I believe the standard of English language can be made equal to that of Chinese language. Four three organisations coming together to hold this seminar is surely a testimony to the concern of our educationists for the need to do more in our schools. I share with you in this concern and shall be happy to give you all the necessary support.

Our teachers have done quite a bit to guide and encourage our pupils to study English as a second language. Their efforts have not been wasted. Results of the GCE 'O' level examination last year have shown marked improvement. However, if we want the new generation of Chinese-stream students to read, write and speak better English as they take their place in our society, we must continue to do even more in this direction. The low standard of English language should not remain a handicap to them either for higher study, seeking employment, or just to mix socially or self-improvement.

When we encourage our students to study their second language, we must not forget their teachers. We should first create a conducive learning atmosphere. This will make language

learning much easier and produce better results. One of the ways to do so is for the teachers to learn together. This is not a new method. It is only an extension of the theory that teaching and learning are complementary functions. The ability to learn a language varies from person to person. The learning ability of the teacher is not necessarily better than that of his student. We must not forget that most of our teachers are monolingual. It will be to their advantage if they can pick up a second language while, at the same time, serve as examples for their pupils. Even if they are not successful, they can at least understand better the difficulties faced by their pupils. At present, a number of Chinese schools have taken steps to create conducive English learning environment. Some schools fix a few days in a week as English speaking days during which only English is used outside teaching hours. One school has even gone further to designate alternate week as English speaking week. Both teachers and pupils are required to use English in their conversation, other than normal class room lessons. Of course, it is always difficult to make a start, but given time your difficulties will be overcome. After all, in learning a language, which is the more effective way than speaking the language itself? Since the above method is found suitable for Chinese schools, I see no reason why it cannot be used in English schools as well. As long as we are determined to learn a second language, I believe our bilingual policy will have even greater success.

In this seminar today, you all will be discussing how to teach and learn English as a second language more effectively. I wish you every success in your deliberations. I hope your findings will bring benefits to our schools. You all know that the future of Chinese school students will be very bright if their command of English is good. With better teaching and higher standard in English, Chinese schools will also be able to attract more students. I believe this is what we all want to see.

Finally, it gives me great pleasure to declare this seminar open.